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Yemen (Sanaa)

Biotechnology

Biotechnology Annual

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Report Highlights:

In early July 2005, the Yemeni Parliament approved the National Biosafety Framework (NBF). It is now awaiting presidential ratification before implementation.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
Cairo [EG1]
[YE]

SECTION I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early July 2005, the Yemeni Parliament approved the National Biosafety Framework (NBF). The new NBF legislation is modeled on the EU approach, which places heavy emphasis on label requirements. It is now awaiting Presidential ratification before it can be implemented. The protocol focuses on the trans-boundary movement of living modified organisms (LMOs). The protocol requires parties to ensure that the development, handling, transport, use, transfer, and release of LMOs are undertaken in a way that prevents or reduces the risks to biological diversity and to human health.

SECTION II. BIOTECHNOLOGY TRADE AND PRODUCTION

Yemen does not commercially produce any biotechnology crops. We do not expect any local biotech products in the Yemeni market within the next year. The Yemeni Agricultural Research Authority recently began collaborating with the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) to establish a biotechnology office and laboratory in the Ministry of Agriculture (ARA) headquartered in Dhamar, around 100 km south of Sanaa.

Importation of biotechnology crops and products occurs from time to time through the private sector, or through food aid programs. For example, USDA had donated corn and soybean in the past. Commercial imports of biotechnology crops and products include: corn, soybean, chocolates, condiments, baby food, cereals, chips, beverages and juices.

SECTION III. BIOTECHNOLOGY POLICY

Biotechnology and biosafety are relatively new issues in Yemen; there is poor understanding and knowledge on the nature and extent of any risks associated with biodiversity and their applications.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, ARA, the Genetic Resources Center (YGRC), and the faculties of agriculture and science of the universities are the key players in biotechnology and biosafety.

With regard to indigenous breeding, researchers have completed limited work. There are developed varieties of sorghum to improve seed color and size, to speed early maturation, and to increase pest resistance. The varieties continue to be widely used in Yemen.

Yemen has made minimal progress in utilizing its biotech resources. This has led to negative impacts on the productivity of various crops, animal and plant species. For example, the introduction of foreign chicken breeds has led to a large reduction in traditional strains. In addition, there have not been any breeding research programs undertaken to evaluate, characterize and improve local strains.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was approved by Parliament in early July 2005. It now awaits presidential ratification before the Yemeni government can implement the protocol. The Yemeni government has appointed an NBC to formulate biotechnology policy and initiatives. The table below lists the interagency committee members.

| NO | INSTITUTION | POSITION |
|----|--|---------------|
| 1 | Minister of Water and Environment | Chairman |
| 2 | Chairman of the General Environment Protection Authority | Vice Chairman |
| 3 | Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Water and Environment | Member |
| 4 | Ministry of Industry and Trade | Member |
| 5 | Ministry of Public Health and Population | Member |
| 6 | Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation | Member |
| 7 | Ministry of Fishery Wealth | Member |
| 8 | Ministry of Defense | Member |
| 9 | Ministry of Fishery Wealth | Member |
| 10 | Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research | Member |
| 11 | Authority of Customs | Member |
| 12 | Yemen Authority of Specifications and Standards | Member |
| 13 | Union of Industrial and Commerce Chambers | Member |

| NO | INSTITUTION | POSITION |
|----|---|----------|
| 14 | Consumer Protection Society | Member |
| 15 | Legal adviser | Member |
| 16 | Four specialized experts in agriculture, science, medicine, and marine sciences appointed by the Chairman | Members |
| 17 | Secretary of the National Committee | Member |

The NBC has the following tasks:

1. Approve the national biosafety policies and determine the procedures and measures that control modern biotechnology in the Republic of Yemen; publishes and makes available the related instructions and guidelines on the national level, and provides and renders technical advice and consultations to ministries, institutions, authorities, scientific organizations, and research centers, etc.
2. Approve the special instructions and guidelines pertaining to the applications of modern technology for the purpose of achieving safe policy for research in laboratories, green houses, field experiments, or the commercial marketing of genetic GMOs and/or their products.
3. Issue licenses for the import or export of GMOs or their products after the review of the applications of such licenses by the subcommittee, scientific committee.
4. Approve plans and training programs in the field of biosafety procedures and recruits national experts specialized in this field.
5. Approve biosafety regulations and ordinances that regulate the safe use and utilization of biotechnology and genetic engineering and their products, this include prohibition against exposure of GMO products to employees and those individuals, who come in contact with GMO products, society, and the environment.
6. Undertake coordination with international and regional organizations. This includes any new and up-to-date scientific or technical information in relation to biosafety issues of GMOs or their products, and obtaining technical assistance, advice, and consultation.
7. Seek the assistance of local or foreign experts in the field of biosafety, pending national committee decision and approval of reference and tasks.
8. Specify the National Focal Point and the contact unit of Biosafety Information Exchange Chamber, so that such information pertinent to the special decisions related to the import, use and local utilization of such GMOs and their products.
9. Take procedures to create public awareness and disseminate information on biosafety issues at the national level through the various media means, taking into consideration the transparency principle and the public participation.
10. Notify the public in advance through the different information and media means of any plan to release or market GMOs or their products, and takes procedures to support public participation in decision-making concerning the issues of GMOs.
11. Approve of the executive by law that prescribes its activities as well as any resolutions issued by the Minister.

12. Submit bi-annual reports to the Cabinet regarding the activities related to GMOs and their products.

Labeling and Identification

According to the new biosafety by-law, all GMOs must be identified and labeled. This is required to indicate that the presence of GMOs in a product cannot be excluded. The label must forewarn of any allergies, reactions or other side effects that the GMOs or products thereof may cause.

An exporter or importer of GMOs and/or their products for domestic use must label each consignment as follows:

1. If it is for direct use as food or feed or for processing, it is to be clearly indicated whether the consignment does or does not contain GMOs or their products and that such consignment is not intended for the intentional introduction into the environment.
2. If it is for the intentional introduction into the environment, it is to be specified as accurately as possible, the identity of the GMOs and their products, their related characteristics and any other requirements for their safe handling, transport, use and storage; as well as specifying the contact point for further information; and also stating that the trans-boundary movement is in conformity with the requirements of Cartagena Protocol that are applied on the exporter.
3. If it is for contained use, the GMOs or their product/s are to be identified clearly and to specify clearly any requirements for their safe handling, transport, use and storage; and also to specify the contact point for further information including the name and address of the person or institution to which the GMOs or their product are consigned.
4. Any additional clarification that the NBC may require.

SECTION IV. MARKETING ISSUES

From an economic point of view, Yemeni consumers are looking for low cost products. GMO products offer an affordable alternative to traditional products. There is a possibility that the Yemeni government will insist on labeling requirements that could adversely affect U.S. agricultural and foodstuff exports to Yemen. The government, represented by the Yemeni Standardization, Metrology, and Quality control Organization (YSMQO), is requesting that labels include production and expiry dates, and an Arabic translation of the origin, product name, trademark, and ingredients.

SECTION V. CAPACITY BUILDING AND OUTREACH

USDA-funded capacity building and outreach activities are limited to a number of Cochran and Borlaug training opportunities. There is a need to further develop expertise with Yemeni officials. Public awareness of biodiversity and biosafety also need strengthening.